

The Goose

Volume 17 | No. 1

Article 25

9-25-2018

Uncontrolled Burn

Elizabeth Miller



Part of the [Poetry Commons](https://scholars.wlu.ca/thegoose)

Follow this and additional works at / Suivez-nous ainsi que d'autres travaux et œuvres:

<https://scholars.wlu.ca/thegoose>

Recommended Citation / Citation recommandée

Miller, Elizabeth. "Uncontrolled Burn." *The Goose*, vol. 17, no. 1, article 25, 2018,
<https://scholars.wlu.ca/thegoose/vol17/iss1/25>.

This article is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Goose by an authorized editor of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact scholarscommons@wlu.ca.

Cet article vous est accessible gratuitement et en libre accès grâce à Scholars Commons @ Laurier. Le texte a été approuvé pour faire partie intégrante de la revue The Goose par un rédacteur autorisé de Scholars Commons @ Laurier. Pour de plus amples informations, contactez scholarscommons@wlu.ca.

Uncontrolled Burn

I. September

The headline reads: *Fires Rage. You Must Evacuate. What Do You Take?*
The question lingers over honeyed oatmeal as the paper goes unread.

Suddenly the fire is something more.
This is not just my family's house;
our communal home is ablaze
while we feed the flames and
promise to reform our ways.

A child's feet patter on the floor.
Though the morning teems
with early light, the hour
is far too late for deliberation.
No newspaper can prepare us for this.

II. October

Dusk, scent of decaying
leaves, ember-tinted sky.
Moisture, chill air,
decline of a year's growth.
But to be undone is to open
the possibility of being re-done.

Geese call out their passage,
and when, for a moment, I close my eyes,
it is with the sensation
that this is everything, that all I have been—
or will be, or am—is wrapped
in the damp odor of woods in October.

My daughter follows the geese
with her two-year-old eyes, and then,
back in the garden, greets her father
and sinks her fingers into the earth.

As she does, we take in a view of pines,
our house, our neighborhood.
The fires out west have calmed,
snow arriving long before it will here,
but the geese give us pause.
He asks what, of all this, I would save.

Ten, twenty years ago, I would have had
a ready answer. I no longer know what to say.

Within my gaze lie the dried husks
of purple flowers from the butterfly bush
and the soft-tipped milkweed he planted
before our daughter turned one.

I have no use for the photos we took
of the slow-moving caterpillars, the chrysalis,
no need for the message he sent to tell me,
after one particularly harsh storm—whose winds
claimed three large limbs of the redbud—
that the caterpillars survived.

Our home has been empty, this week,
of the summer's wildflowers, their remains
nourishing the soil, absent the hummingbirds
that hovered, drinking, preparing
for their long flight home.

I watch her digging in the dirt and smell October once again.

This.
I would save this.

Why didn't I think of it sooner?

III. November

It is late afternoon, and the only fire
I see burns safely in the metal confines
of the wood stove. I toss in the article,
still unread, asking what I'd take
if I had to evacuate. Each headline
and heartache is its own kindling,

impossibility hovering in the margins.
Surely this is someone else's story, not mine,

except the fire is in my mind,
smoldering in the perfect silence
of knowing too much, and also
not enough. Having been betrayed,
we risk betraying our children.

Once, a small red fox approached
and peered straight into this room,
then left as quickly as it had arrived.
We are poised and ready
for all the wrong things.
If anything is to rise from these ashes,
I won't be surprised to find it verb
and not noun, or maybe a simple,
universal cry: *madre, nne, mare,*
 ema, majka,
 mother.

ELIZABETH MILLER is an educator who lives in Maryland, midway between the Blue Ridge Mountains and the Chesapeake Bay. She enjoys hiking with her husband and daughter.